

THE PROBLEM OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS

It is thought that the following Memorandum sent by Mr. Hanson, Secretary of the Teachers' Association, might be found useful by Members of the Committee on Public Schools.

1. Private schools may be divided roughly into the following classes:-
 - a. Kindergarten schools taking pupils up to the age of 13 or 14. This group includes the Preparatory Schools working for the entrance examinations to Public Schools and it also includes what I consider the most undesirable form of private school, namely, the one which serves as a cheap substitute for the efficient kindergarten and junior school or as a convenient substitute for the public elementary school. The latter are here referred to arises from the fact that in these schools there is a possibility of irregular attendance and for some parents this is an attraction, since it allows them to keep the children at home without disturbance from the attendance officer who calls at once if the child is absent from a public elementary school.
 - b. Private schools which retain their pupils up to the age of 16 or even 18. I am inclined to think that in most cases these schools are fairly efficient since they have to meet the competition of the endowed grammar schools and the rate aided secondary schools.
12. It is generally held that private schools should be inspected and in spite of a certain dissent with regard to State interference, the members of the Primary Schools Association hold the view that inspection would be welcome since they have no desire to bolster up inefficient schools. It may be said that all the good schools are willing to be inspected.
13. The difficulty of instituting such an inspection arises from the fact that the cost would be heavy. We have no means of knowing even approximately the outlay involved, since no one knows how many private schools there are. An essential preliminary to any inspection is that there should be a survey. When the survey has been made and we know the number of schools, we can discover the possibilities of a State inspection.
14. Such a survey seems to me a part of the work imposed upon the Local Education Authority by the Education Acts. These require that the Local Education Authority shall provide and maintain enough school places and that they shall take steps to ensure that all children in their area are under efficient instruction up to the age of 14 or up to such an age as entitles them to leave school provided their attainments are satisfactory. Since these are the obligations placed on the Local Authority and since the Board of Education is charged with the duty of seeing that these obligations are fulfilled, it seems to be reasonable for the Board to invite each Local Authority to submit a return of the schools within its area, showing first, the number of children under 14, second, the number of public elementary schools provided, and third, the number of private schools which are used. In this way we should have a complete census of the existing private schools. The census would require no great outlay since every Local Authority has its own returns of these.

No question of inspection would arise at this stage. This would have to be considered later when the matter of schools was known.

- V. **Inspection.** There is at present no machinery for compelling private schools to submit to inspection. A strong argument would be offered if it were possible to not submit to such schools. It is held that the payment of grants to schools not under public control would be unadvisable, but the possibility may be regarded in another way. If Smith, the citizen, sends his child to a public elementary school up to the age of 14, paying no fees, it is surely not unadvisable to say that Jones, a bank clerk, who is also compelled or led to have his child educated up to the age of 14, shall have the benefit of an equivalent State aid even if he does not send his child to a public elementary school but sends him to a private school and pays a fee to supplement the Government grant. It is eminently fair that the State should be prepared to aid to the same extent the education of every child up to the age of 14. This seems to be a corollary of compulsory education up to that age and no case could be maintained against permitting a parent to send his child to a fee-paying school if he desired to do so and receiving at the same time the benefit of the State grant in aid of the education of all children under 14. The grant would, of course, involve inspection and a licensing of schools but this would be an advantage since it would be possible to prevent the setting up of schools such as now exist conducted by unqualified teachers and need only to give out a small income.

I hope that this question
question bristles with difficulties but I am convinced that we ought not to be content so long as we have the anomaly of compulsory education up to the age of 14 with free public elementary schools paid for, in part, by middle class ratepayers, who receive no aid in the provision of that education for their children which they themselves desire. It is this circumstance which does so much to hamper even the public elementary schools and gives rise to the common argument of the small tradesman on the Local Education Committee that he has to pay for the schooling of his own children and also has to pay rates for the education of the children of other people. If we could establish the principle that every child of school age, that is between 5 and 14, is of value to the State and therefore a proper recipient of State aid, we should greatly advance the cause of education.